



Staying on Task

Many times students have difficulty knowing what to do if they have a problem with an assignment, or they don't understand the task a teacher has asked them to complete, or other students are trying to talk with them when they should be doing their work. It is a common practice for teachers to prompt their students to "stay on task." While it happens all the time, many students do not really know what behaviors they should use when they are asked to stay on task.

The goal of the lesson is to teach students the appropriate behavioral expectations for the skill of "Staying on Task."

The objectives of the lesson for students include:

- learning the steps of the skill of "Staying on Task."
- practicing the skill.
- generalizing the use of the skill to different places and different people.

Introduce the Skill

Ask the students to brainstorm things that happen in the classroom that distract them when they are trying to complete their work. List these on the blackboard or on an overhead.

NOTE: Examples might include someone talking while others are working, fire drill bells going off, someone coming into the classroom noisily, another student tapping his or her pencil on the desk, the teacher talking to someone at the door, etc.

Ask students to then brainstorm some strategies for coping with distractions or for when they have difficulty with an assignment. List these in a different column on the board or on the overhead.

NOTE: Examples might include telling myself to stay out of it, ignoring the people who are talking to me, count to 10 when I have to wait, ask someone else for help, etc.

Describe the Appropriate Behavior

Provide students with the behavioral steps for the skill of “Staying on Task.”

NOTE: Steps can be posted on a bulletin board or shown on an overhead, etc. Please adapt the steps to fit your expectations and the needs of your students.

SAY: “Here are the steps of the skill of ‘Staying on Task.’”

- 1. Look at your task or assignment.**
- 2. Think about the steps needed to complete the task.**
- 3. Focus all of your attention on the task.**
- 4. Stop working only when instructed.**
- 5. Ignore distractions and interruptions from others.**

SAY: “These are the steps we are going to use for the skill of ‘Staying on Task’ in this class and building.”

Give a Reason

Ask the students to provide reasons for why they think it might be important to stay on task using these steps. Here are some examples of reasons to use in case students have difficulty thinking of ones on their own:

- You don’t interrupt others who are trying to work.
- The teacher might get to you more quickly to help you if he or she sees you are trying to continue to work.
- You are more likely to complete your assignments and not have homework.

Practice

Choose one or more of the following activities to complete your lesson by allowing the students to practice the skill.

1. Have students tell their partner the steps of the skill.
2. **Journaling ideas**
 - Ask students to write about a time when they stayed on task while other students were trying to get them involved in another activity. What was the outcome?

- Ask students to write about a time when they did not stay on task but should have. What was the outcome?
 - Ask students to write about a time when they should have stayed on task and didn't. What should they do differently if they find themselves in a similar situation again?
3. Discuss with students options for what they should do if they don't understand a certain part of or a particular question on an assignment after the teacher has asked them to stay on task. Some examples include:
- Skip that particular question or problem and go back to it later.
 - "Ask Three Before Me": Teach students to ask three other students for help if the teacher is not available. Students can ask the teacher for help later if they still need it.
 - Encourage students to have "buddies" in the class. Pair up students based on their strengths and weaknesses, both behaviorally and academically. Allow students to work with their "buddy" if they need extra help during on-task time when the teacher is not available.
 - Make a plan for students to engage in DEAR Time (Drop Everything and Read). This might be something as simple as making sure students always have a book on their desk to read if they don't have anything else to work on, if they complete a task, or if they are having difficulty with a task and don't want to bother others who are still working.
4. **Class discussion and role-play:** Talk with students about different situations where they may have to stay on task. Use the following role-play scenarios to have students model the appropriate way to stay on task in specific situations.
- The teacher is helping another student with his or her work and you don't understand how to work the next math problem.
 - The students are taking a test and some finish before time is up.
 - A student comes to the door and calls out to someone in the class to come into the hallway and talk.
 - The principal knocks at the door and asks to speak to the teacher immediately. The students are reading a novel aloud in class.
 - As the teacher is lecturing, one student begins to talk to another and tries to get him involved in a conversation.

SAY: “Thank you for completing the practice activity. We will continue to discuss the skill of ‘Staying on Task’ for the rest of the week.”

NOTE: Each day of the week, review the steps of the skill, discuss why it is important to use the skill, and practice when possible.

Preventive Prompt

There are many times during the course of the school day when you can prompt students that they are going to have to stay on task. Prompt students to repeat the steps to you or review the steps with them prior to them using the skill.

Other Ideas for Practice

NOTE: As you develop other ideas for practicing the skill, write them here and share them with other staff members in your building.

For younger students (K-5), use literature to lead a discussion on how to stay on task. Books by popular children’s author Julia Cook, including *I Just Want to Do it My Way!*, are recommended.

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